



Sue Robertson
Director of Corporate Affairs

Direct Tel: 020 7550 5633
Direct Fax: 020 7497 5621
Email: robertsons@channel5.co.uk

27th February 2001

Paul Heron
Head of Public Service Broadcasting Policy Branch
Room 410
DCMS
2- 4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH

Dear Paul,

Proposed New Public Services From The BBC

I have read the BBC's documentation in support of its case for new digital services and it is clear that there are a number of issues of significance to a wide range of UK broadcasters. However I am writing to you on behalf of Channel 5 and will confine my comments to the BBC proposal for CHANNEL THREE which is the proposal that could have the most impact upon Channel 5.

The BBC states two specific reasons for changing and improving the quality of its existing digital channels:

1. "As an incentive for analogue switch-off and
2. To offer channels, and thus more choice, for those who cannot afford pay television but will be forced to go digital."

In the context of these stated intentions we wish to question the public service purpose behind BBC3 - the proposed new digital television service which aspires to supply comedy, drama, music, news, arts and education for a younger audience.

www.channel5.co.uk

Registered in England no. 3147640

Registered in England no. 3147640



If the BBC genuinely wish to persuade the last 30% of the population to switch over to digital television then they should not focus the bulk of their new digital programme spend (£95 million in 2002/2003) on a channel that is aimed at wooing a young audience. The youth audience is already well served and indeed chased by all the commercial broadcasters. It is also the one demographic grouping that is less in need of persuading as to the merits of digital television than any other. In order to persuade the doubters to convert to digital TV, the BBC should devote this extra income to programming for a much older demographic.

Some of the public service selling points claimed for BBC THREE also bear further examination. For example, the BBC proposal states that its news will be "unique" with live hourly news bulletins targeting the attitudinally young in a way that is stylish and modern without compromising journalistic content.

In fact 5 News, produced by ITN for Channel 5, already provides an alternative and complementary news service to the existing bulletins on ITV, BBC and Channel 4. In the past three years 5News has pioneered a different style of news presentation and production with a fresh, direct and less formal approach than that of its rivals. Channel 5 is also the only terrestrial channel that actually does offer viewers comprehensive hourly news updates in peak time seven days a week.

The BBC also claim 'freedom from commercial pressure will enable programme makers and viewers to innovate and let their imaginations fly free'. In fact the need to innovate with new formats and new talent in order to attract a young audience is a sine qua non already well recognised and practiced by commercial broadcasters such as Channel 5 and Channel 4.

Of all the new services being proposed by the BBC, a free-to-air, peak time youth channel has to be that which is the least likely to provide more real choice and added value for the viewer and must also be the least effective way of converting the actual doubters to switch to digital television.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sue Robertson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sue Robertson
Director of Corporate Affairs



25 June 2001

Vanessa Brand
Head of the Public Service Broadcasting Branch
DCMS
2-4 Cockspur Street
London
SW1Y 5DH

Dear Vanessa

BBC New Services

I am writing with reference to Andrew Ramsay's letter to me of 7 June concerning BBC's additional information and with regard to its proposed new digital and television services.

In our initial response to DCMS (27 Feb 2001) we commented on the BBC's proposal for BBC Three as this is the proposition with the highest potential impact upon Channel 5. Again I will confine my comments to this proposal.


The section of the BBC document entitled 'Distinctiveness – differentiation against existing networks', refers to Channel Four, Sky One and to E4, but nowhere does it mention Channel 5 or touch upon the similarity of their proposed new service with that already being delivered by ourselves. For example, the Corporation's description of the BBC Three news service as 'dedicated, every hour, stylish, credible and specifically positioned to reflect the needs of a younger audience' could just as easily be applied to Channel 5's existing news service. We are the only terrestrial channel to offer viewers news on the hour in peak time seven days a week.

Five News is full of facts upbeat in tone and less formal than its main rivals. We are energetic, controversial and not afraid of being polarising. Our factual programmes are purposefully direct, informative and jargon free. We have pioneered late night, affordable UK made drama and aim to give a sense of fun and danger to our entertainment programmes. Our social responsibilities are recognised and well represented through our education and religious programmes. And in the four years we have been on air we have given a huge boost to the UK production sector by commissioning an additional 4,500 hours a year of originated programmes from 250 different independent production companies.

The youth audience offers the potential of a commercially attractive demographic, and as such it is already well served and indeed chased by all the commercial broadcasters. Of all the new services being proposed by the BBC, a youth channel is the least likely to provide more real choice and added value for the viewer. And to add to this, young people do not need any persuading as to the merits of digital television, so in this respect also, BBC3 will be an expensive as well as ineffective way of getting more converts for digital television.

With reference to Andrew's last sentence, I hereby give permission for you to make public any information which we have provided.

Yours sincerely



Dawn Airey

cc Andrew Ramsay